

THE EFFECT OF THE "HAPPY HIGHWAY" GAME ON
COMMUNICATION OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS IN INITIAL GROUP
COUNSELING SESSIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

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<u>THE EFFECT OF THE "HAPPY HIGHWAY" GAME ON COMMUNICATION OF</u>						
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Counseling children is becoming more crucial given the stresses that children deal with on a daily basis. Drugs, violence, death and dysfunctional family situations are growing concerns for today's youth. The use of games in initial group counseling sessions pertaining to elementary students may increase affective communication. Since group sessions at the elementary school level typically meet five times, it is important to develop rapport within the group as soon as possible. The Happy Highway game (Aid Association for Lutherans) was used to determine these effects.

As experimental study included a control group of twenty randomly assigned elementary students. Ten students played the game, and ten students used a list of questions from the game in initial group counseling sessions. The data was collected by the researcher, a trained observer, using a tally of verbal affective responses. The

data was then compared by a Chi-square test to examine the independence of the two groups studied.

It was hypothesized that the use of the game with elementary students in initial group counseling sessions would increase affective responsiveness. The null hypothesis was that there was no difference in affective communication between the groups that used the game and those groups that used only the questions from the game. The results of communication differences were opposite of the direction hypothesized in the formation of this study. It was expected that students in groups exposed to the game board format would be more likely to demonstrate affective communication behaviors. Measured behaviors reported in this study showed greater responsiveness in the group exposed only to the game questions. Since there was not a significant difference between the two groups of students using the game or using the questions from the game, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. The results from this study may be different under ideal circumstances, which would include larger groups of samples, video recording the sessions for more accurate measure of response and including a third group that uses no tool at all.

This study showed no significant difference between two groups of students in group counseling sessions at the elementary school level, using the Happy Highway game, and using game questions only. However, there is reason for further study of the use and importance of games in initial counseling sessions.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

For centuries, children have used game-play to express themselves; "war," "cowboys and Indians," and "house" to name a few we are most familiar with. Board games, such as Candyland, and Shoots and Ladders are also enjoyed by youngsters.

Archaeologists have recovered game artifacts from ancient tombs and temples. A Sumerian game board (c. 2600 B.C.) was recovered from the royal cemetery at Ur of Chaldees, and Egyptologists have recovered dice and board games dating from 1400 B.C. Another indication that games were played in early 1400 B.C. is graphic information. A number of tomb mural and paintings restored by archeologists depict ancient people playing games (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971).

Some games were introduced during the Great Depression, particularly Monopoly, now the best-selling board game in history. Monopoly offered individuals a chance to fantasize about overcoming the economic hardships that were part of American life during the 1930's (Radler and Kephart, 1960). This game, even with the influence of computer games, is still popular today.

Games are also used across cultures and serve many of the same functions from culture to culture. Game-playing is a nearly universal human activity, only a handful of the most primitive societies do not possess games. In many cultures, game-playing appears to presage social skills that are required later in life (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

Under the influence of Freud and his disciples, the game has been regarded by some students of the subject as a compensation or substitution for instincts suppressed by the normal conscious. Presented in the innocent form of a game, they are accepted by society without question (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

It has been found that when children and adults meet, play provides a common language to express the depth of thoughts, emotions, and experience. Children's

interests in playful approaches involving games, imagination, fantasy, and story telling may initially appear irrelevant. But within these realms of meaning-making we find treasures that are central to the child's motivation and ability to resolve problems (Freeman, Epston, Lobouits, 1997).

Play is a key factor in a child's development, learning and self-concept. Research studies have demonstrated a significantly positive correlation between self-concept and parental acceptance, academic achievement, classroom adjustment, perceptions of others, emotional adjustment, and overall personal adjustment. Children express their thoughts and feelings through play (Landreth, Homeyer, Glover, Sweeney, 1996).

Playfulness is also an important part of child counseling, and counseling with children in groups is no exception. Being playful helps you to enter the world of the child. As a normal human, the counselor can expect to feel positive, negative, and even angry toward some children. The counselor must bear in mind that he is in constant interaction with other people's children who by definition have been brought up in very incongruous ways. The counselor, however, must not become just another child. The authors suggested that the counselor get used to playfulness (Dinkmeyer and Muro, 1971).

While traditional forms of therapy are effective with many children, there are some children who find it difficult for various reasons to respond to traditional approaches that require self-disclosing to the therapist in a one-to-one relationship or in group therapy sessions (Schaefer and Reid, 1986). Psychologists have used children's natural drive to play in counseling as early as 1928. At that time, psychoanalyst, Anna Freud, used play to lure children into therapy, to interest the child in therapy and in the therapists (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

In 1934 Mead was among the first to recognize the importance of games in the socialization process. According to Mead, the child is seen as learning to

differentiate themselves from others and also to gain basic communication skills through participation in games (Schaefer and Reid, 1986). Game playing has been an interest in therapeutic sessions since the 1970's (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971).

To differentiate games from play, it is important to recognize the difference between these two widely used tools of therapy. In the literature on the subject of games, the term usually refers to formal, organized games that include rules (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971). Game playing is an activity that shares at least two of the basic elements of play: both are meant to be fun and to provide a context for fantasy experience (Moyles, 1989).

As opposed to play, games have more structure and set rules that inform players about the roles they will play. Games can also be very competitive, which can provide a useful analogy to naturally occurring conflicts. Games allow children to experience healthy, structured competition. By their very nature, games arouse competitive feelings in children, but at the same time the rules of the game require that children compete within certain limited boundaries (Moyles, 1989).

Games with rules are social games that involve regulations imposed by the group for violation of rules. Games, rules, and players deal with interactions problems in which the behavior of others must be taken into account. In Monopoly, for example, the playing child must know his / her own the role as well as the role of the other players. Games are self-motivating and form an end in themselves (Reilly, 1974).

Play, on the other hand, is generally seen as a spontaneous activity that has no particular purpose and is motivated only by a desire for fun. Play also has an unrestricted, unstructured quality. Play at times involves structure, as when a parent puts limits on a child's play, but generally play is unstructured (Sharp, 1969).

Play is believed to have an important role in such early developmental tasks as separation, individualization, exploration of the environment, mastery of anxiety, and

achievement (Schaefer and Reid, 1986). Play activities are seen as being of great value in modern educational settings and as a method of unique and unparalleled value. Play is always a "doing." Play is, almost by definition, interesting and fundamentally satisfying. In a game under good leadership, the child's emotions, mind and body are working together. A boy or girl will give 100 percent attention to play, though not always to studies. Leaders of childhood find in play activities their shining chance to develop right attitudes of mind, so fundamental to character (Rogers, 1932).

Games are often used in therapy to bring the child's unconscious conflicts, expressed within the context of the game, into the arena of conscious awareness and verbal expression. Communication board games enable children to project aspects of self, both those aspects known and unknown to the child. Often these projections involve the presenting problem which was the cause for referral, and additional areas of client concern beyond the initial focus. (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

Loomis explained that many games are now used in therapy as a so-called icebreaker. Loomis also emphasized the game as a vehicle for expression of resistance and unconscious conflict on the part of the child (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

Because of the everyday stressors that children are faced with today, the need for counseling is vital. For many children, the first counselor that they will have contact with is the school counselor. Group counseling sessions in the elementary school are vital for two reasons. First, group sessions allow the student to relate to his/her peers regarding issues common to their age level. Second, it gives the school counselor the opportunity to meet with more students than individual counseling alone would permit.

The typical school-counseling group consists of five students, and meets for five or six weekly sessions. As a result, time is precious. If the use of board games can expedite affective communication in initial elementary counseling groups, both

the student and the counseling group would benefit. Quick establishment of rapport would allow more time for working with student issues.

"Happy Highway" is an Aid Association for Lutherans board game that can be used in-group counseling sessions to initiate verbal communication between the elementary student and other group members. My study showed the value this game had on initial group counseling sessions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this experimental study was to determine if the use of the game, Happy Highway, would significantly improve verbal affective communication among elementary students in initial group counseling sessions. In view of the life stressors children experience such as divorced parents, drug and alcohol abuse within the family, and physical abuse, the need for effective counseling is apparent. This study serves to improve the initial group counseling session for elementary students.

The dependent variable, affective communication in initial group counseling sessions, was measured by students' verbal sharing of feelings and personal ideas in initial group counseling sessions. The dependent variable, using the Happy Highway game in initial group counseling sessions with elementary students, was measured through observational techniques. Specific communication measures included counting the number of times the students shared personal information in the initial group counseling session.

The subjects used in this investigation were 20 randomly selected elementary students from four classrooms at Fall Creek Elementary School in Fall Creek, Wisconsin, during the Spring semester, 2000. Ten of the students were selected as the experimental group and were placed in two groups of five students each. These students played the Happy Highway game in the initial group counseling session with the counselor. The second group of ten students comprised the control group, and were placed in two groups of five students each. These students read from an established list of questions in the initial group counseling session with the counselor. It was hypothesized that elementary students using the Happy Highway game in initial group counseling sessions would show greater amounts of affective communication than the students who did not use the game. The next sections will state the research and null hypothesis.

Research Hypothesis

H = Elementary students using the Happy Highway game will have enhanced affective communication in initial group counseling sessions.

Null Hypothesis

Ho = There is no statistically significant difference in affective communication for elementary students who use the Happy Highway game in initial group counseling sessions and those students who use only game questions.

Definition of Terms

Happy Highway Game: *Happy Highway* (Aid Association for Lutherans, 1999) is a structured board game designed to let the players move from start to finish by following a "road" that includes stop signs, yield signs and go signs. Plastic cars are used for game pieces, and dice are included to determine the number of spaces each player will move. If the player lands on a go sign, he/she chooses a yellow card. If the player lands on a yield sign, he/she chooses a blue card. Each card asks a question, such as "When you're feeling angry, what helps you calm down?"

Affective Response: Verbal communication which shows an emotional state, such as love, affection, joy, distress, anxiety, depression, anger, to name a few.

Initial Group Counseling Sessions: When working with elementary students, the counselor has many opportunities to bring students together (usually groups of five) to discuss peer pressure, family changes, death and many other issues effecting children today. The first, or initial, session is sometimes awkward, since the students may not know each other, or are not used to discussing issues with their peers.

Controlled Delimitations of Scope

Due to time constraints in the classroom and in student schedules, the limitations were viewed as areas that would be changed in future studies. The size of the experimental groups was a limitation, caused by time constraints and the lack of

opportunity for initial sessions. This matter was taken into account, knowing that this study could be repeated with larger samples at a later date. If the researcher were a staff school counselor, groups would be initiated all year, and samples would be much larger.

The method of recording created additional limitations. Here only group tallies were recorded. In future studies, video recording of sessions could allow more accurate and precise data recording. Statistical power was limited in this study because only group data was recorded. Future studies may enhance power through the use of individual level data. However, vulnerability associated with the use of minors as subjects would require greater attention to the protection of human subjects. As a result, the ethical issue of confidentiality would be more important if individual scores were recorded and reported.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Because play and therapeutic board games were commonly cited in similar contexts, they were presented throughout this paper in the same context in my paper. Self-concept is the internal measure of one's worth. Self-concept may be defined as the perceptions that individuals hold about themselves or as a set of beliefs about self. Play is a key factor in a child's development, learning, and self-concept. Research studies have demonstrated a significantly positive correlation between self-concept and parental acceptance, academic achievement, classroom adjustment, perceptions of others emotional adjustment, and overall personal adjustment. Children express their thoughts and feelings through play (Landreth, Homeyer, Glover, Sweeney, 1996).

Definition of Therapeutic Board Games and Play

To differentiate games from play, it is important to recognize the difference between the two widely used forms of therapy. In the literature on the subject of games, the term usually refers to formal, organized games that include rules (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971). Games, as opposed to play, have much structure and set rules that inform players about the roles they will play. Games can also be very competitive, this can provide a useful analogy to naturally occurring conflicts. By their very nature, games arouse competitive feelings in children, but at the same time the rules of the game require that children compete within certain limited boundaries (Schaeffer and Reid, 1986).

Some examples of traditional games are: Monopoly, Uno and Candyland, to name a few. Game playing is an activity that shares a least two of the basic elements of play: both are meant to be fun and provide a context for fantasy experience (Moyles, 1989).

Games with rules are social games that involve regulations imposed by the group for violation of rules. They deal with interaction problems in which the behavior of others must be taken into account. In Monopoly, for example, the playing child must know the roles of the other players as well as their own role. Games are self-motivating and form an end in themselves (Reilly, 1974).

According to Evelyn Sharp (1969), play was generally seen as a spontaneous activity that has no particular purpose and is motivated only by a desire for fun. Play also has an unrestricted, unstructured quality. Some play involves an amount of structure, as when a parent puts limits on a child's play, but generally play is unstructured. Play is believed to have an important role in such early developmental tasks as separation, individualization, exploration of the environment, mastery of anxiety, and achievement (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

According to James Edward Rogers (1932), play activities are seen as being always of large value in modern educational procedure and sometimes of unique and unparalleled value. Play is, almost by definition, "interesting and fundamentally satisfying." In a game under good leadership, the child's emotions, mind, and body are working together. A boy or girl will give 100 per cent attention to play, though not always to studies. Leaders of childhood find that play activities offer a shining chance to develop children's right attitudes of mind, so fundamental for character development.

Group experiences, will often evoke necessary imitation, social interaction, cooperation and competition. A child's sense of self and personal awareness often develops in relation to his awareness of others. Discouragement may be avoided when frustrating experiences are rapidly adjusted and when 'losers' in a game, for example, are given a chance to redeem themselves quickly. Shared experiences will solidify feelings of companionship and pleasurable learning. What is agreeably learned is long remembered (Reilly, 1974).

History

Archaeologists have recovered game artifacts from ancient tombs and temples. For example, a Sumerian game board (c.2600 B.C.) was recovered from the royal cemetery at Ur of Chaldees, Egyptologists have recovered dice and board games dating from 1400 B.C. Another indication that games were played in the early 1400's, is graphic information. A number of tomb murals and paintings restored by archeologists depict ancient people playing games. Game playing has been an interest in therapeutic sessions since the 1970's (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971).

Some games were introduced during the Great Depression, particularly Monopoly, now the best-selling board game in history. Monopoly offered individuals a chance to fantasize about overcoming the economic hardships that were part of American life during the 1930's (Radler and Kephart, 1960).

Importance of Play and Therapeutic Board Games in Therapy

While traditional forms of therapy are effective with many children, there are some children who find it difficult for various reasons to respond to traditional approaches that require self-disclosing to the therapist in a one-to-one relationship or a group therapy session (Schaefer and Reid, 1986). Play therapy, according to Virginia Axline, is based upon the idea that play is the natural form of self-expression for children. It gives the child the chance to "play out" his feelings and issues the same way an individual "talks-out" his difficulties as an adult (Axline, 1969).

When children and adults meet, play provides a common language to express the depth of thoughts, emotions, and experience. Children's interests in playful approaches involving games, imagination, fantasy and story telling may initially appear irrelevant. But within these realms of meaning-making we find treasures that are central to the child's motivation and ability to resolve problems (Freeman, Epston, Lobouits, 1997).

Playfulness is an important part of child counseling, and counseling with children in groups is no exception. Being playful helps you to enter the world of the child. As a normal human, the counselor can expect to feel positive, negative, and even angry toward some children. As Shaw (1966) states, the counselor must bear in mind that he is in constant interaction with other people's children who by definition have been reared in quite wrong ways! The counselor, however, must not become just another child. The authors suggested that counselors must get used to playfulness (Dinkmeyer and Muro, 1971).

Psychoanalysts such as Anna Freud (1928) used play to lure children into therapy, to interest the child in therapy and the therapist (Schaefer and Reid, 1986). Herbert Spencer (1971), an early psychoanalyst, pointed out that play is a "cathartic theory," according to which play has a definite function in the growing child in that it provides a means by which he or she can work off past emotions and find imaginary relief for past frustrations (Landreth, Homeyer, Glover and Sweeney, 1996).

Mead (1934) was among the first to recognize the importance of games in the socialization process. According to Mead, the child is seen as learning to differentiate themselves from others and also gain basic communication skills through participation in games (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

Loomis (1957), explained the concept that many games are currently used in therapy as a so-called "icebreaker." Loomis also emphasized the game as a vehicle for expression of resistance and unconscious conflict on the part of the child (Schaefer and Reid, 1986). Coleman (1962) examined play under the concept of simulation and found that games could also be designed to have a measurable impact on intellectual learning, attitudes, and strategies (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

In childhood and society Erikson (1963) developed concepts regarding ego identity and group identity. He proposed that play was an effective safeguard in maintaining the stability and continuity of one's meaning for other people. Personal

identity, he suggested forms the matrix for developing identity as a group member in a social role (Reilly, 1974).

Robert Waelder's classic 1933 article, "The Psychoanalytic Theory of Play," emphasized that play leads not to tension reduction, but also had values for wish fulfillment, the passive to the active, and for giving a temporary leave of absence from reality (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971). Under the influence of Freud and his disciples, the game has been regarded by some student of the subject as a compensation or substitution for instincts suppressed by the normal conscious. Presented in the innocent form of a game, they are accepted by society without question (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

According to Schaefer and Reid (1986), communication board games enable children to project aspects of self, both known and unknown to the child, often these projections involve the presenting problem which was the cause for referral. Games are also structured discussion of additional areas of client concern which were not the initial focus of the therapist.

By the very nature, games arouse competitive feelings in children, but at the same time the rules of the game require that children compete with certain limited boundaries (Moyle, 1989). Games are also used across cultures and serve many of the same functions from culture to culture. Game-playing is a nearly universal human activity, only a handful of the most primitive societies do not possess games. In many cultures, game-playing appears to presage social skills that are required later in life (Schaefer and Reid, 1986).

As we can see in the literature, games and play have been part of children's nature for centuries. Therapists have used play in sessions since Anna Freud. Games allow not only an expression of fantasy, but provide a chance to act out feelings and problems being dealt with by the child.

Summary of Literature

The literature showed the use of play and games as being an important part of therapy sessions for children. Play was said to be an important part of the child's development as well as an important part of counseling, allowing the therapist to enter the work of the child. We saw in the literature that games and play have been used by therapists, as far back as Anna Freud, who used play to entice children into therapy.

Critical Assessment of the Literature

The use of board games in initial group counseling sessions for the specific outcome of affective response has not been covered in the literature. For that reason, this study has merit. When looking at the stresses of everyday life that today's children are experiencing, counseling is a growing need in the schools. Group sessions for students are necessary for two reasons: group sessions allow the student to relate to peers experiencing similar stresses; and the counselor has so many students to counsel that individual counseling may be unavailable, given the numbers of student one counselor per school is responsible for.

Time is also a factor. Group sessions are usually limited to five or six weekly sessions. If the students use the first two or three sessions to be comfortable with each other before sharing affective communication, there is little time for therapy. If this study demonstrated positive benefits from board game use, games could be used more often in school counseling with groups. This study postulated enhanced communication in groups that used a board game format. If the use of a board game enhanced affective responsiveness, student and the group would benefit.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Procedures

An experimental group consisting of 10 randomly assigned elementary students played the Happy Highway game in the initial group counseling session. A control group consisting of 10 randomly assigned elementary students did not use the Happy Highway game but were exposed to the same initial group counseling session prompts using a list of questions from the game. The experimental group was randomly separated into two groups of five students, and the control group was randomly separated into two groups of five students.

Each counseling session used a typical group counseling format of five students to facilitate the group interaction. Two groups of five students for both the experimental and control subjects were used, and communication results were then combined in order to increase the number of students studied. The students were brought into the counselor's office, one group at a time. The students were asked to complete a demographics questionnaire with information about gender. The participants were observed during the initial group session. The number of times any member of the group provided personal data was recorded. i.e.: family information, personal opinion, personal view on any topic. Each session lasted 30 minutes. In addition, the researcher recorded a summary of group process observations. This was consistent with the qualitative method suggested when measuring variables affected by process or when the topic of interest involves social interactions that may not be adequately captured in standardized quantitative format.

Subjects

The subjects for this experiment were 20 elementary students, randomly chosen from elementary classrooms at Fall Creek Elementary School in Fall Creek, Wisconsin, during the Spring semester of 2000. Fall Creek is a rural community in

West-Central Wisconsin. These human subjects (minors) were protected by using a Human Subjects Consent form through University of Wisconsin, Stout, as well as a letter to parents for permission for their student to participate in the study (see page 40).

Instruments

Happy Highway game (Aid Association For Lutherans, 1999). This game was used to determine if a board game would increase communication between elementary students and counselors/peers in initial group counseling sessions. Prior to the implementation of this study, permission for use of the Happy Highway Game was granted by the Aid Association For Lutherans. A high positive correlation has been found between the students that use the game in the initial group counseling session, and a high number of personal statements ($r = +.80$). This board game allows the student to move around the game board by a throw of dice and then moving game pieces. On certain squares, the student has the opportunity to choose a "feeling" card, or a "personal experience" card. The personal responses were counted. A list of questions from the game that were used with the control group, and are listed below.

1. Say something you like about yourself?
2. Tell of a time when you felt safe?
3. Give three things you are good at?
4. What is something you like to do by yourself?
5. What was the worst thing that happened to you today?
6. What would you do if you could stay up all night?
7. What is one thing you often worry about?
8. What is one of the nicest things someone ever did for you?

Data Collection

The data was collected and recorded by a trained observer, using a tally. Each time a student in the group made a verbal response, it was recorded on an affective response sheet. Each group was delineated by grade in school, and whether the game or the questions were used in the initial group session. Observations about the group process were recorded by the researcher who has been trained in understanding group process and child development.

Predictor Validity

Predictor is the game, and the predicted criterion is communication.

Demographics

The purpose of the demographics collected was to allow the reader to understand how applicable this sample is to their population. The demographics response format was multiple choice.

Analysis of Data

A control group true experimental design was conducted. The two groups were compared by a Chi-square test to examine the independence of the two groups studied. The data was collected and recorded by a trained observer scoring the group responses rather than individual responses.

Unknowns

Extraneous variables which could affect the results of the study were: parent's refusal of consent, consent forms not returning to school in a timely manner, students absent on day of session, and because of random assignment, some students may have been placed in a group with a friend or classmate they felt uncomfortable around .

Strengths for Method

Responses were collected and recorded by a trained observer and a true experimental design, using randomly assigned groups. Using initial group counseling sessions for the study gives a baseline so all the students are at the same level of

familiarity with the counseling group. The affective response list (page 26) gave a planned collection of responses.

Limitations

The limitations to this experiment was the size of the experimental groups used. Limitations in sample size can reduce the power to pick up meaningful relationships that exist in data. This is of considerable concern in studies such as this where effect the method of recording the responses, and the time constraints, since the groups were only available to me at certain times, and I was only interested in using initial counseling sessions, and gathering data.

Summary

The experimental design used for this study looked at two groups of elementary students and the affective responses given in half-hour group counseling sessions. The instruments used consisted of the Happy Highway game, for the treatment group and a list of question from the game used with the control group.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the use of the Happy Highway game would significantly improve verbal and affective communication for elementary students in initial group counseling sessions. It was hypothesized that the use of the game with elementary students in initial group counseling sessions would increase affective responsiveness. The null hypothesis was that there was no difference in affective communication between the groups that used the game and those groups that used only the questions from the game.

Demographics

Subjects in this study included twenty elementary students, five students each from 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th grades. These students were randomly drawn from their respective classes for participation. The control group was comprised of 5th and 4th grade students, and used the questions from the game. The 1st and 3rd grade students were the treatment group, and used the game. All students were present on the day of the initial counseling session. All of the students randomly selected for participation turned in consent forms signed by the parent and student. Therefore, all subjects chosen were included in sample. Specific demographic questions and sample description follow:

Circle the correct answer:

1. Are you male female

Totals

Game - Male = 4
 Female = 6

No Game- Male = 5
 Female = 5

The demographics of the two groups were quite similar. Each group consisted of ten students, and the ratio of male to female students was nearly the same for each group.

The treatment group differed from the control group in the grade level of students included. Due to scheduling constraints, the game-question-only control group was comprised of two groups of five 4th and 5th graders. The game-board-playing treatment group was comprised of two groups of five 1st and 3rd graders.

The group affective response was recorded by the researcher, using a tally of verbal responses made by the subjects in each of the sessions. As shown in Table 1 below, the affective responses of the groups were very similar to each other in some areas, such as "spontaneous 'I' responses from group members." and " 'I' statements from individual." In other areas, however, there was greater difference, as in "Identified own feelings in self."

Table 1: Affective Responses

Communication	Grade 1- 3- 4- 5	May, 2000	
		Game	No game
1. "I" statements from individual		20	18
2. Identified own feelings in self		8	23
3. Spontaneous "I" responses from group members		39	39
4. Individual's verbal response to group member's personal statements		5	4
5. Individual's verbal response to others affective communication		4	3
6. Spontaneous response to content		14	25
7. Showed understanding of feelings others might have: vocal / verbal		<u>2</u> 92	<u>4</u> 116

In order to examine differences between the two groups in the study a Chi-Square was computed. This required determining what scores were expected given the scores that were observed. Table 2 below, shows the observed communication values for each different type of behavior and the expected value of scores if the groups were in fact independent of each other. If the game board treatment had a significant effect on communication, it would be expected that the treatment and control groups would be different or independent of each other.

Table 2: Observed and Expected Frequencies

Observed table									
types of behaviors					Group 1	Group 2			
A	B	c	D	E	18	20	38		
	F				23	8	31		
	G				39	39	78		
					4	5	9		
					3	4			
					25	14	39	92	
					4	2		208	
					116				

exact expected freq if grps are independent									
21.19	23.1	16.8		38					
17.28	8.46	13.7		31					
43.5	34.5		78						
9									
3.90	3.84	6	3.1	7					
21.75	17.3		39						
3.34	6.15	4	2.65	6					
116	92	208							

Expected freq in integers									
21	17		38						
17	14		31						
44	34		78						
5	4		9						
4	3		7						
22	17		39						
3	3		6						
116	92	208							

Chi-square computed for total measurement of communication, showed the magnitude of differences found between the treatment and control group scores given the scores of both groups. For future replication, it is important to note that the only chi square result that was examined for significance was the result for total group communication. Result of the Chi Square to test group differences was 9.59. In order to meet the test for independence at .05 level, the magnitude of the chi square result would have to be at least 12.59. The results of the chi square comparison of the two groups (game vs. no game) showed that there was no significant difference in

affective responsiveness. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there were no differences between the groups that used the game and those that responded to game questions. Thus, the research could not prove that the two groups were different after treatment.

Table 3 below, illustrates these results and shows a total Chi-square of 9.59. In order for the groups to be significantly different the Chi-Square results would have to have a magnitude of 12.59. Differences in each type of communication were not analyzed individually because performing so many statistical tests would have resulted in alpha inflation, or increased the risk of a false positive finding.

Table 3: Chi-Square Computations

Chi for each pair of Gelis		
0.43	0.53	2.12
	2.57	0.57
	0.74	0.20
	0.25	0.25
	0.33	0.41
	0.53	0.33
	0.33	
total	chi	9.691
Chi at 5% with 12.59		
Not significant		

Though there was not sufficient overall communication difference for the two groups to be viewed as independent, there were group differences in several areas of responses. This was apparent upon examination of the actual scores of the two groups in each of the behavior categories. When comparing behavior type with counts of affective response, there was a marked difference in the two groups in several categories of communication response.

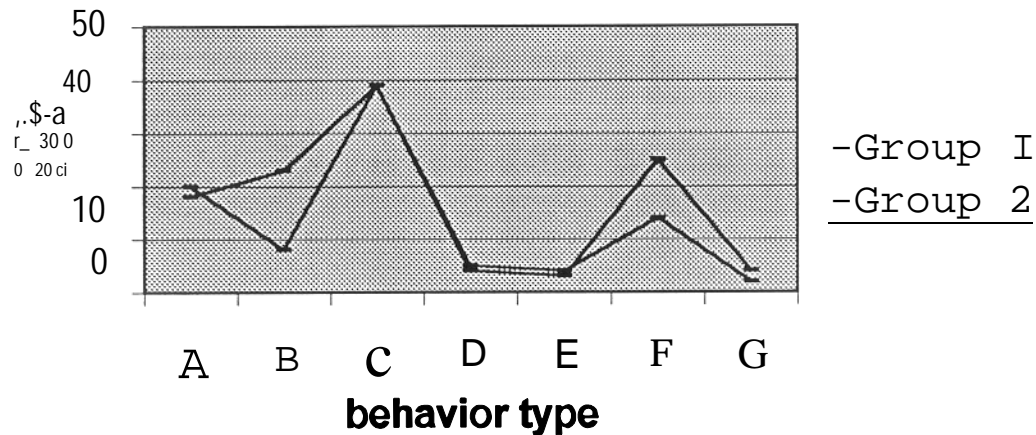
As mentioned although separate behavior types were not analyzed for significant difference between groups, differences in responses were apparent. There was considerable similarity between treatment and control groups in many types of communication behaviors, but two types of communication, "identified feeling in

self" and "spontaneous response to content" showed more pronounced differences.

This is illustrated on the next page in Table 4 of behavior types.

Table 4: Behavior Patterns

2 groups categories compared



There was agreement in behavior between the groups when looking at affective responses such as those in the first behavior category (1) which included '1' statement from individual," and those in the third behavior category (3) spontaneous '1' responses from group members." Some of the questions used in the study required I statement responses. These questions tended to have more similarity in response across the groups.

Greater between group variability was noted in those behavior categories that were not specifically prompted by the game/list questions. The group behavior occurrences that were more substantially different included those in category (2), " **identified** own feelings in self, " and behaviors in the sixth category (6) which reflected "spontaneous response to content." Although there were few recorded observations in the seventh behavior category (7) "showed understanding of feelings others might have vocal/verbal," there were twice as many responses of this type in the control group.

Results of communication differences were opposite of the direction hypothesized in the formation of this study. It was expected that students in groups exposed to the game board format would be more likely to demonstrate affective communication behaviors. Measured behaviors reported here, showed greater responsiveness in the group exposed only to the game questions. There are a number of potential explanations for the effects that were observed in this study. These will be described in a discussion of conclusions in Chapter 5.

Observations

In comparison to typical initial group counseling sessions at the elementary school level that used no tool, the researcher observed a greater amount of affective response in the two groups using the game or game questions as compared to typical initial groups. The researcher also observed that the younger grade level students spent more time playing the game than answering the questions that the game asked. The older students that used the questions focused on the questions, and did not appear distracted by the game pieces or by the goal of arriving at the finish line. Both groups showed interest and cooperation in playing the game and in answering questions. There was also some qualitative evidence that students responded positively to the introduction of the game questions. Both groups asked about continuing the game or questions at the second counseling session.

Summary

Since there was not a significant difference between the two groups of students using the game or using questions from the game, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this research was to determine if the use of the Happy Highway game would significantly improve affective communication during initial group counseling sessions with elementary students. A comparative experimental design study was used to show the differences between the groups of students that used the game during the initial group counseling sessions and the groups of students that used only questions from the game in the initial group counseling sessions.

Conclusions

There are a number of alternative plausible explanations for the no difference findings reported in Chapter 4. One possible conclusion is that there really were no benefits associated with the use of the game board. Another possible conclusion is that the introduction of the game board was so distracting that it negated any potential communication or group process benefits. Other alternative explanations relate to artifacts of working with students in the school setting, or to methodological issues that may have hindered measurement of effects of the board game use. The section below describing the influence of group makeup will explain some of the confounding issues that may have influenced observed treatment effects.

Influence of the group makeup. Students were randomly selected for involvement in the study. The subjects included students from the 1st and 3rd grades and from the 4th and 5th grades at the same school. As a result of scheduling difficulties however, the older students were assigned to the control group of game questions only. At the onset of the study, it had not been anticipated that grade level would have such a pronounced effect on affective production. As described in Chapter 4, marked differences in responsiveness were noted between the groups, especially in interactional and revealing or unsolicited responses. The treatment group of younger children who actually played the game was observed to have fewer affective

responses especially in the area of unsolicited responses and those that required responsiveness to others. Trained observer comments from Chapter 4 indicated that the younger students were more involved in board game play, and may not have focused as much attention on the interactional opportunities presented by the question discussion. These students may also have been more intimidated by the group format and so have been more inhibited in their self-revealing responses. Older students may not have been as affected by the presence of the group.

Influence of the question format. Some questions solicited ‘I’ statements by requesting information about personal experience. Such questions elicited the most response in both groups. This finding was developmentally typical of children at this age, since they tend to be very self-focused.

The behaviors that were more substantially different between the groups were tallies in the area of “Identified own feelings in self.” Recognition and identification of emotions is difficult for students of this age. A major developmental task at this age is to become aware of and appropriately incorporate emotions into behavior. Understanding emotion is often one of the goals of elementary counseling activities. Another important early elementary school task is to learn about school structure and about getting along with others. During these primary years in grades 1-3 students are trying to get along in peer groups, and are not sure of “self” yet. This may have inhibited responses for both groups but appeared to have an especially pronounced impact on the younger students. This would be expected in younger students who have recently moved beyond parallel play and are working to incorporate others in their awareness, while adjusting to the school setting.

The research showed that there was not a significant difference between the groups of elementary students using the game and those using only the questions from the game during initial group counseling sessions. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. However, the results may be different under ideal

circumstances, including larger groups of samples, video recording the sessions for more accurate measure of response, and including a third group that uses no tool at all.

Influence of sample sizes. As noted elsewhere, both the norm and treatment group contained only ten students each. Having such a small group of participants meant that there was insufficient statistical power to recognize small treatment effects. In this case, since both groups were exposed to some treatment and only the method of exposure was different it was expected that effect sizes would be small. It is possible that there were significant differences between treatment and control groups, but the small sample sizes generated insufficient statistical power to detect those differences.

Influence of affective communication measurement. The researcher tallied responses within the group by hand. The presence of observation in the group may have altered individual member behavior. This could potentially have affected the treatment group more than the control group since younger students tend to be more easily distracted than older students. The absence of objective measurement was also a concern in this study. Differences that existed may not have been recorded because of the researcher's dual role as group leader and behavior recorder. Group interaction with five children at a time may also have made recording each instance of eight different types of behavior more difficult.

Influence of both groups being exposed to game questions. Another possible interpretation of no difference findings in this study is that both groups benefited from exposure to treatment. At the onset of the study, it was hoped that sufficient students could be solicited for participation to allow measurement of a group that received only the standard initial counseling treatment. That would have allowed detection of differences from the introduction of game questions. This was impossible due to scheduling barriers. It is possible that such a design would have

demonstrated that substantial differences did exist when students were prompted with game questions.

Implications

Counseling children is becoming more crucial given the stresses that children deal with in their lives such as violence, drugs, and dysfunctional family situations. The use of games in group counseling sessions may provide the student with understanding of self, empathy toward peers dealing with concerns and improve interaction in class settings, by enabling the student to discuss their concerns openly. Although the results of the study did not show significant differences in overall affective communication, there were specific areas of communication that may have been enhanced. Children in all groups were active and engaged, suggesting that the use of tools to prompt personal sharing in groups made counseling an enjoyable and participatory experience. This was especially evident when students asked if they could continue the game/questions in the next session. This eager anticipation of the next session is important because the students signified a pleasant introduction to counseling, which could have an affect not only in these sessions, but attitudes toward counseling in the future. The positive response to counseling also makes the school a more pleasant place for these students. This is particularly important in light of the recent Columbine shootings, where students had perceived school as an unwelcome and hostile environment.

Communication is also important in elementary grades. The use of the Happy Highway game in group counseling sessions stimulated interaction with parents through communication with the researcher, and communication between parent and student. The parents and students received a letter explaining the study, which prompted discussion between parents and the students. Each student selected for inclusion had the opportunity to discuss the game and topics of importance at home with their families.

There was also increased communication between school and family when purposes of the study were explained. Parents, teachers and school counselors are all critical potential supports for student growth and development. Enhanced communication between parents and school personnel stimulated by this study was an unanticipated benefit. This served to highlight the fact that any techniques that emphasize communication are important to people concerned with children's well-being. This also suggests that there may be other benefits to game use than those measured and reported within this study. Because of this, the importance of incorporating game play with counseling groups of children needs to be looked at further.

It is also important to note that even differences too small to be significantly different using statistical tests, may have real life implications. Small effects in areas of higher-level communication skills, may have profound impact on a child's ability to cope and upon the child's daily life. For instance, if subsequent research demonstrated a consistent pattern of gains after treatment in the areas of student ability to recognize and respond to the affective communication of others, this would have important impact for empathy even if effect sizes never reached the level of statistical significance. Thus findings in this study serve as an introduction to a counseling tool that is worthy of further study. This will be described at greater length in the discussion section below.

Recommendations

As a result of the lack of significant difference findings and the range of possible explanations for those findings previously discussed, the primary recommendation from this study is that further study is needed. There was evidence that effect sizes, though small, may be of great importance. Such effects may be even more important over time. Before additional recommendations are made based on the results of this study, many of the questions posed here must be answered. Therefore

recommendations will focus on further research that needs to be done in the area of the use of games with elementary students and game use in initial group counseling sessions.

There are some design issues, such as the small numbers of students in each group. It is important to use greater numbers when repeating this study. Fairly small effect sizes are anticipated. Thus larger samples are required for adequate statistical power to detect between group differences that may exist. Elementary grade levels used were randomly assigned to the game versus using the questions. However, the 4th and 5th grade students used the questions, while the 1st and 3rd grade students played the game. It would be interesting to see how the older students reacted to the game, and how the younger students handled the questions. However, the study also showed that parents are not averse to students participating in the research, and the school showed support for this area of research.

Recommendations for further study include:

1. Repeat the study, recording individual responses by video. This would allow for more exact recording of response by several observers, as well as the ability to compare the groups by means of a T-test. By recording the sessions on video, the researcher would be free to be more attentive in the session by not being concerned with the list of affective responses, and the job of tallying responses. Video taping the session would also offer the possibility of inter-rater reliability to the study, giving greater credence to recorded communication measures. It would also allow for measuring individual responses of each student, making it possible to compare by using a T-test of inferential statistics with greater statistical power to examine the independence of groups.

2. Repeat the study using a T-test in order to look at the means using individual responses for greater statistical power to demonstrate differences that may actually exist.

3. Repeat study with larger groups. This could be done during the year with each initial group session, using samples from all grade levels, and comparing the grade levels

and use of the treatment and control tools. Using larger groups would not only provide greater statistical power, but would also permit the researcher to add other grade levels to the sample. It is important to compare the use of the game and the use of questions with same grade levels, as well as crossing grade levels with each other in order to see which tool would benefit the group member's affective responsiveness the most. This would allow the group members in the future, to be offered the tool for their grade level that would best suit their needs.

4. Repeat study using three groups: One group using the game, the second group using the questions from the game, and a third group using no tool. The addition of a third group to the study would allow the researcher to compare a sample of students that participate in initial group counseling sessions using no counseling tool with those samples that used the game and the samples that used the list of questions from the game. This is important because many initial group sessions with children are uncomfortable for the individual group members, who are not used to counseling or are not familiar with the other members of the group on a level that would make affective responses possible. The responsiveness of members of a group with no exposure to game questions could then be analyzed as a baseline measure of standard counseling methods.

5. Make use of the advantages of experimental design by varying group composition. This would increase the possibility for finding more substantial differences between the use of the game and the absence of any tool at all. It would be also be interesting to compare the three samples for differences in gender and grade, as well as varying the groups by the use of the tools. Subsequent studies could also examine the time in the group process at which the treatment was introduced. As mentioned previously there may be varied effects and benefits associated with board game and affective question prompts depending on when the tools are used.

Summary of Conclusion

This study showed no significant difference between two groups of students in

group counseling sessions at the elementary school level, using the Happy Highway game, or questions from the game. However, in light of what the literature stated and what the study shows, there is reason for further study of the use of games in initial counseling sessions.

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May 3, 2000

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student in UW Stout's Guidance and Counseling program, working with Ms. Larson at Fall Creek Elementary School. I am doing a study through the University on a new board game called "Happy Highway," and will be working with several elementary classes. This study is to show the benefits of the game in improving communication and is not expected to cause harm to students. Twenty students will be chosen to be a part of this study, and possibly to try this new game.

Your permission is needed for your child to be a part of this study. Your child's educational program will not be affected in any way by your decision. At the bottom of this form please check that you are or are not willing to have your child participate. Then sign the lower portion of this form, and return it to school in your child's folder by Monday, May 8, 2000.

If you have any questions about this study, please call me at UW Stout @ (715) 232-1207, or my advisor, Dr. Susan Eberhard, @ (715)232-1442. The results of the study will report only group information. All information used in developing the final report will be kept confidential. A copy of the final report will be sent to the school counselor office. You are welcome to view that information. Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Eileen K.Oswald

Dr. Susan J. Eberhard

I, _____, do _____ do not _____ (check one)
 agree (parent name)

to allow _____ to participate in this study on the Happy Highway
 game. (child's name)

Signature _____ Date _____

Child's signature _____ Date _____

NOTE: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher or the research advisor and second to Dr. Ted Knous, Chair, UW-Stout, Institutional Review Board of the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.